

THE PRESENT TENSE (SADAŠNJE VREME) OF IRREGULAR VERBS

Below are the present tense conjugations of the most frequent Serbian irregular verbs. A list of verbs discussed here is as follows:

1. biti 'be'
2. hteti 'want'
3. moći 'can'

I The present tense of **biti** 'to be'

Like in English, this verb is irregular, hence, you have to memorize it. This verb is also discussed in Lesson 1.

Table 1: Present tense of the verb **biti 'to be' – short (clitic) form**

SINGULAR		Examples		
Ja (I)	sam (am)	Ja sam dobro. (I'm well.)		
Ti (you)	si (are)	Ti si dobro. (You're well.)		
On/ona/ono (he/she/it)	je (is)	On je dobro. (He's well.)	Ona je dobro. (She's well)	Ono je dobro. (It's well)
PLURAL		Examples		
Mi (we)	smo (are)	Mi smo dobro. (We're well.)		
Vi (you)	ste (are)	Vi ste dobro. (You're well.)		
Oni/one/ona (they-m/f/nt)	su (are)	Oni su dobro. (They're well –for masculine nouns)	One su dobro. (They're well – for feminine nouns)	Ona su dobro. (They're well – for neuter nouns)

Notes about the forms in Table 1:

- The present tense forms of **biti** (or **jesam**) in the above table are called short or 'truncated' forms, or what grammarians call **clitics**.
- The long or full forms of **jesam**, shown in Table 2 below are used only for purposes of emphasis. In a normal conversation, one would use short or 'clitic' forms, presented in Table 1.
- In a way, clitics or truncated forms of 'to be' are found in English too, as in: *I'm*, where '*m*' is a shortened form of **am**, or '*we're*', where *re* stands for **are**.

Table 2: The present tense of the verb **biti 'to be' – long forms**

SINGULAR		Examples		
Ja (I)	jesam (am)	Ja jesam dobro. (I'm well.)		
Ti (you)	jesi (are)	Ti jesi dobro. (You're well.)		
On/ona/ono (he/she/it)	jeste (is)	On jeste dobro. (He's well.)	Ona jeste dobro. (She's well)	Ono jeste dobro. (It's well)
PLURAL		Examples		
Mi (we)	jesmo (are)	Mi jesmo dobro. (We're well.)		

Vi (you)	jeste (are)	Vi jeste dobro. (You're well.)		
Oni/one/ona (they-m/f/nt)	jesu (are)	Oni jesu dobro. (They're well –for masculine nouns)	One jesu dobro. (They're well –for feminine nouns)	Ona jesu dobro. (They're well – for neuter nouns)

- To negate the verb **jesam**, one has to prefix the negative particle **ni** (but not **ne**) to the short forms of **jesam**.

Table 3: Negated forms of **jesam**

SINGULAR		Examples		
Ja (I)	nisam (am)	Ja nisam dobro. (I'm not well.)		
Ti (you)	nisi (are)	Ti nisi dobro. (You're not well.)		
On/ona/ono (he/she/it)	nije (is)	On nije dobro. (He's not well.)	Ona nije dobro. (She's not well)	Ono nije dobro. (It's not well)
PLURAL		Examples		
Mi (we)	nismo (are)	Mi nismo dobro. (We're not well.)		
Vi (you)	niste (are)	Vi niste dobro. (You're not well.)		
Oni/one/ona (they-m/f/nt)	nisu (are)	Oni nisu dobro. (They're not well – for masculine nouns)	One nisu dobro. (They're not well – for feminine nouns)	Ona nisu dobro. (They're not well – for neuter nouns)

Note that the negative particle **ni** and the present tense forms are treated as one word, so they are written together.

Also, you cannot negate the full form of **jesam**: *ne jesam, *ne jesi.

The verb **biti (jesam)** 'to be' has an additional (or extra) present tense conjugation. In that sense, it is totally unique.

The present tense of **biti** 'be'- all forms

The table below shows both the present tense conjugation of both forms of **biti**: regular and extended (or extra) forms.

Table 4: Present tense of the verb **biti 'to be' – all forms**

	Full form	Short form	Negated	'extra forms'
SINGULAR				
1	jesam	sam	nisam	budem
2	jesi	si	nisi	budeš
3	jeste	je	nije	bude
PLURAL				
1	jesmo	smo	nismo	budemo
2	jeste	ste	niste	bedete
3	jesu	su	nisu	budu

Notes about the forms in Table 4:

- As we said earlier, the fully accented forms in the first column are used mainly for emphasis.
- The short or clitic forms in the second column, are used regularly.

- To negate the verb ‘**jesam**’, you just insert the particle ‘ni’ to the short forms of ‘jesam’.
- Now look at the column with ‘extended’ present tense forms of ‘biti’. They don’t resemble ‘jesam’ forms at all.
- You may notice that these ‘biti’ forms conjugate like the regular **–em** present tense class of verbs.
- So when do you use these two different present tense forms of biti?
- The **jesam** and **sam** verbs are used in all sentence types: declarative, interrogative.
- The **budem** verbs are specialized for the following sentence types: sentences that begin with the particles: **kad**, **ako** and **da**, usually used for conditional sentences, as in 1. and 2 below, or for the so-called Future Tense II (hypothetical), as in sentence 3.

An example with the extended form of ‘**biti**’

1. Ako budem u Americi, nazvaću te.
“If I am in America, I will call you.”
2. Kad budeš došla u Ameriku, nazovi me.
“When you come to America, call me.”

II The present tense of **moći** ‘can’

The second, also very frequently used verb, is **moći** ‘can’ that has irregular present tense forms. Its conjugation is shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Present tense of **moći ‘can’**

Singular		Examples		
Ja (I)	mogu	Ja mogu govoriti srpski. (I can speak Serbian.)		
Ti (you)	možeš	Ti možeš govoriti srpski. (You can read Serbian.)		
On/ona/ono (he/she/it)	može	On može govoriti srpski. (He can speak Serbian.)	Ona može govoriti srpski. (She can speak Serbian)	Ono može govoriti srpski. (It can speak Serbian.)
Plural		Examples		
Mi (we)	možemo	Mi možemo govoriti srpski. (We can speak Serbian.)		
Vi (you)	možete	Vi možete govoriti srpski. (You can speak Serbian.)		
Oni/one/ona (they-m/f/nt)	mogu	Oni mogu govoriti srpski. (They-m can speak Serbian.)	One mogu govoriti srpski. (They-f can speak Serbian)	Ona mogu govoriti srpski. (They-nt can speak Serbian)

- The verb **moći** basically conjugates like the regular **–em** verbs, except for the first person singular. It has the ending **–u**, instead of **–em**.
- The present stem has the infix **–g**. That is, in the first person singular and third person plural. All other forms have **ž**. You may ask why. This is due to the phonological rule that turns **g** into **ž** before the vowel **e**. This process is called palatalization, when the consonant becomes ‘softer’ (pronounced more towards the palate) in the vicinity of the front vowel, such as **e**.

III The present tense of **hteti** ‘want, will’

The table below shows both the present tense conjugation of **hteti**: full form, short form, and negated form.

Table 6: Present tense of the verb **hteti ‘to want, will’ – all forms**

	Full form	Short form	Negated	Examples
SINGULAR				
1	hoću	ću	neću	Ja ću ići. ‘I want to go.’
2	hoćeš	ćeš	nećeš	Ti nećeš ići. ‘You don’t want to go.’
3	hoće	će	neće	On hoće pevati. ‘He wants to sing’
PLURAL				
1	hoćemo	ćemo	nećemo	Mi ćemo pevati. ‘We want to sing.’
2	hoćete	ćete	nećete	Vi nećete ići. ‘You don’t want to go.’
3	hoće	će	neće	Oni će šetati. ‘They want to walk.’

Notes about the forms in Table 6:

- Just like the verb **jesam**, the verb **hteti** also has full present forms and short forms. The full forms are used for emphasis only.
- To negate the verb **hteti**, you prefix the negative particle **ne** to the short forms of **hteti**.
- This verb is used for making future tense as well, since it also means ‘will’. See the future tense file.

As a conclusion to this section, here is the table of all conjugated forms for all three irregular verbs:

Table 7: Present tense verb forms for **biti, **hteti** and **moći****

English	Infinitive	Present – short forms singular - first line plural –second line	Present – long forms singular - first line plural –second line	Verb class
be	biti	sam, si, je, smo, ste, su	jesam, jesi, jeste, jesmo, jeste, jesu	fully irregular
want	hteti	ću, ćeš, će ćemo, ćete, će	hoću, hoćeš, hoće hoćemo, hoćete, hoće	-em class but irregular
can	moći		mogu, možeš, može možemo, možete, mogu	-em class but irregular